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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 006628

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI NSA EILAND ON HAMAS IN ELECTIONS, PEACE  
WITH THE PALESTINIANS

Classified By: Political Counselor Norm Olsen. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d).

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) Israeli National Security Adviser Giora Eiland told NEA DAS Robert Danin November 18 that Hamas will continue to honor the tadiyah ("calm") as long as it believes it serves its interests. Eiland said the calm could be extended through Israeli general elections scheduled for March 2006, or could be disregarded after Palestinian elections in January. Eiland assessed the Labor Party's new leader, Amir Peretz, as representing the very left of his party, and suggested that Peretz might push for a final settlement with the Palestinians. He suggested that another "unilateral disengagement" is unlikely due to the short time before Israel's general elections, but admitted that the current or future GOI could make some bold moves if it calculated that Israel would get a better deal for being cooperative from the current U.S. administration in comparison to a future one. Eiland suggested that the Palestinians could be encouraged to take more moderate, constructive positions on peace if neighboring Arab countries were pulled into the process and forced to take positions on issues. Eiland said that Israel is not overly concerned about the power of Hamas as a result of its participation in January 2006 Palestinian general elections because it believes that the Palestinian Authority cannot accomplish anything of importance, regardless of whether it is strengthened or weakened by Hamas's performance. Eiland suggested that PA President Abbas has no interest in taking on Hamas and other terrorist organizations, attributing this to weakness in his character. End Summary.

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ELECTIONS CERTAIN TO INFLUENCE ATTITUDES TOWARDS PEACE  
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12. (C) Asked by Danin about the tadiyah, Eiland mused that it might be extended until the Palestinian elections scheduled for January, and the Israeli elections scheduled for March. He suggested that Hamas has good reason to maintain the tadiyah until the results of the elections and their consequences are known. After that, he supposed Hamas's approach might change. In this respect, Eiland thought the current situation might last for the next two months. If Hamas decides that the tadiyah serves their interest, then the "relative calm" will continue. Eiland stressed that the current calm is relative because Israel does not count every time the Palestinians launch a Qassam rocket or mortar shell into Israel from the Gaza Strip. "We ignore them now, even though there have been dozens of launches since disengagement."

13. (C) Eiland suggested that the Labor Party's new leader, Amir Peretz, might try to push for jumping ahead to final status negotiations with the Palestinians. He noted that in recent public statements, Peretz has said that, in contrast to Sharon, the time had come to resume a political dialogue with the Palestinians with a view towards reaching a final settlement. In this respect, Eiland said that Peretz is not very different from Yossi Bielin and his Meretz party: "He's very left-wing, to the left of the left wing, while Ehud Barak would, in comparison, be characterized as representing the right of the left wing."

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EILAND: HAMAS PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS OF LITTLE CONCERN  
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14. (C) Eiland said that he is "not really concerned" about Hamas's participation in the January Palestinian elections. Eiland explained that Israel's policy on this issue is very simple -- Israel is not concerned about Hamas increasing its power, because Israel does not believe that there is a "legitimate, accountable and practical" Palestinian Authority that may be either strengthened or weakened as a result of elections in the first place. Eiland stressed, "We don't believe that this existing Palestinian Authority is capable of doing important things. Whether Hamas is strong or not is not important in this situation." Eiland continued: "If Hamas takes control of Gaza, I am not sure that it will be so terrible for Israel. We cannot see change in the performance of the Palestinian Authority even if Hamas is not

strengthened."

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EILAND ON ABBAS AND TERRORIST GROUPS, PEACE PROCESS  
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15. (C) Making it clear that he could not know for sure, Eiland suggested that Abbas's inability to deal with Hamas reflects his desire not to take on the terrorist organization. Eiland observed: "When I was in the military, our platoon leader used to tell us, 'I can't' is the cousin of 'I don't want to.' In other words, when people say they cannot do something, it is usually because they do not want to do something." Eiland said that the Palestinians need to make an important strategic decision to give up terrorism for political gain. He said he does not believe this will happen for the foreseeable future, and attributed this to something lacking in Abbas's character, or his "lack of understanding of the Palestinian people and what they need."

16. (C) Eiland admitted that Abbas has spoken out against terrorism, but stressed that he has not followed through with action. He said the Israeli and Palestinian positions on the way ahead do not differ much on substance, but diverge on process. He explained that the GOI position is that the Palestinians first have to dismantle the terrorist organizations before the two sides can discuss political issues, while the Palestinians need to see a clear political solution with a timetable for implementation and international guarantees before they will disband Hamas and other terrorist groups. Eiland said, "They do not say this to you, but this is what they mean. I do not blame them, and can understand them. They do not see it as a smart move to confront Hamas and other militant groups before a guaranteed political outcome. We will not be able to change our position so long as they retain theirs as it is."

17. (C) Eiland said that if Abbas is given the choice to make the "correct, strategic decision" or to maneuver for advantage between groups, he will choose the latter option, regardless of the results from the upcoming elections. Eiland mused that this is probably because Abbas is a tactician. He observed that there are some Palestinians who believe that time serves their interests, and suggested that Abbas may be one of them.

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ELECTION ISSUES: "WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED BY WAITING?"  
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18. (C) Eiland said he believes that the question of whose interests time serves will become a controversial issue in upcoming Israeli general elections. He wondered aloud: "Will Israelis insist on security provisions before political dialogue? Or should we change our policy and try to reach an agreement now, keeping in mind that the current U.S. administration may be more friendly to Israel than future administrations?" Eiland suggested that there are two reasons for trying to reach a deal with the Palestinians now:

1A. Even if Israel jumps to a final settlement based on President Bush's letter to PM Sharon -- including on substantive issues like territory and defensible borders -- some Israelis suggest that it will be easier for Israel to obtain what it wants with the help of the current U.S. administration; and

1B. The current strategic environment is good for Israel: "Iran does not yet possess nuclear weapons. Syria is weak. There is more support in Arab states for the peace process than there used to be. All of this equates to less external pressure on Israel's borders."

19. (C) Eiland stressed that since Israel realizes that 90 percent of the final settlement is known to everyone, including provisions on Israel's borders, the status of Jerusalem, and security provisions, it raises the question, "Why wait ten years to reach an agreement that can be reached now?" Eiland predicted that the issue will be a defining one for the political Left, based on Labor's principles and Peretz's leadership.

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EILAND ON POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER, UNILATERAL DISENGAGEMENT  
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110. (C) Eiland said that the notion of another unilateral disengagement could be eclipsed by new elections. He explained that if the elections were to take place in November 2006, PM Sharon would be forced to reveal his political plan for carrying disengagement to the next step: "In such a situation, saying that Israel will wait on the Palestinians would not be enough." With elections on the near horizon, however, Eiland said it is hard to imagine that the PM will be able to come up with another initiative before elections. Eiland suggested that if Sharon leaves Likud,

(NOTE: Which he has since done. END NOTE.), he may need a new agenda, feeling that he needs to differentiate himself from Netanyahu and the other Likud "rebels." Eiland observed that PM adviser Dov Weisglass and others are thinking about unilateral withdrawal, but Eiland said he does not believe they will persuade Sharon. Eiland said that thoughts about another unilateral withdrawal are based on the assumption that Israel will get something more substantial from the international community in return -- especially from the U.S.

11. (C) Eiland laid out three possible next steps, stressing that the decision would depend on the response from the U.S.:

- 1A. some sort of symbolic withdrawal from the West Bank;
- 1B. a more significant withdrawal from the West Bank;
- 1C. revert to the fence/barrier (an option Eiland said would be the "most courageous") Eiland said that if it chose this option, then Israel could claim that according to UN Resolution 242, the land remaining on the Israeli side of the security fence would remain Israeli. He said such an option might be smart if one thinks far into the future. It would not be worth it, he said, if one were thinking only about reducing tensions with the Palestinians.

12. (C) Eiland said that until recently, Ehud Barak said Israel should withdraw to the fenceline and then reach an agreement with the U.S. and the international community that this solves the problems of occupation until a final settlement is found. Israel would then insist that until a final settlement is reached, no further requirements could be levied on Israel. Eiland characterized this line of thinking as very far from the way PM Sharon thinks. He said that he cannot imagine that Sharon would decide to execute an additional withdrawal for nothing.

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EILAND SUGGESTS AN ARAB ROLE IS NEEDED IN THE PEACE PROCESS  
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13. (C) Eiland said that if one recalls Aqaba, Sharm-el-Sheik and Camp David, there needs to be an Arab role in supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. He suggested that Israel had not done a good job translating this view into policy, mainly because it would "open up a can of worms." On the other hand, he observed, Israel has already invited the Arabs in by involving Egypt in disengagement. He wondered aloud that there may be a role for Jordan or Saudi Arabia.

14. (C) Eiland observed that there are two different levels of assistance that Israel's Arab neighbors could provide.

1A. tactical assistance: Saudi Arabia has decreased funding to Hamas, but has not completely stopped it, and could do more. Egypt could do more to regulate the Egypt-Gaza border.

1B. strategic assistance: Eiland said that if the parties stay with a two-state solution, Israel and the Palestinians will have to make concessions. Eiland maintained that it will be easier for the Palestinians to make concessions on issues like the final status of Jerusalem and refugees if they are supported by the Arabs on these issues. Eiland said that what is needed is for the Arabs to support the Palestinians on other concessions, especially on religious issues. He admitted that it may be premature to discuss such issues now, but also suggested that the final status of Jerusalem will not be as difficult to resolve as people think. He said that you can divide Jerusalem into two parts: 1) all the Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem; and 2) the Old City (one kilometer squared), the mountain, and all the important religious sites. The latter, he said, would be the real problem. Eiland said that Abbas probably understands well that the refugee problem cannot be solved with Israel. Eiland said that Abbas needs partners to realize a solution to the refugee problem. If the Lebanese government gives full residence rights to the Palestinians living in Lebanon, this would help Abbas to be more moderate. If the Saudis recognize the two-state solution as meaning a Palestinian state and a Jewish state, then this would be significant. Eiland explained that the current problem is that there are differing interpretations as to what the two-state solution means.

15. (U) DAS Danin cleared on this cable.

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